

Council overrides veto on public financing, approves sale of Long Reach

A rendering of the proposed plan for the redeveloped Long Reach Village Center in Columbia. (Courtesy photo)



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The county council Monday voted to override County Executive Allan Kittleman's veto of the creation of a public finance system for campaigns, and to approve the sale of the Long Reach Village Center to Orchard Development Corp.

The passage of the small donor public finance system puts an end to a process that began earlier this year after voters approved the development of a system that would draw campaign donations through government appropriations. The council initially passed the measure on June 5, but it was quickly vetoed by Kittleman. Tonight's 4-1 council vote overrode that veto.

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"So in November there was a vote by the citizens of our county to require us to move forward on this legislation. We've worked diligently in the time since the election to put together legislation that was thoughtful and covered the entirety of the matter," council chairman Jon Weinstein said during the meeting. "I believe the bill before us sets us on a path to restore and improve confidence in our democracy here in Howard County, and I'm proud and pleased to vote yes."

Councilman Greg Fox was the sole vote against the bill. Fox also voted against the bill when it was originally put before the council.

Another measure that the council crossed off its agenda on Monday was to officially approve the sale of 7.7 acres at the Long Reach Village Center to Orchard Development Corp. for \$2.5 million.



The approval is one in a multi-step process to begin the revitalization of the dilapidated center. The next step is for the county and Orchard to enter into a purchase and sale agreement, which is slated to be finished by the end of August, according to a timeline from the Department of Planning and Zoning.

Orchard's purchase of the property will not actually be finalized until after a due diligence period is completed by the firm, which according to the timeline would be in January 2018. Orchard would have the option to back out of the agreement during this time before the sale closes.

The long-awaited bill to amend the county's adequate public facilities ordinance was also introduced tonight, along with the controversial bill to amend the county's regulations on composting facilities and natural wood waste recycling facilities. Under the new regulations, wood waste facilities as accessory to tree farms would be allowed on properties deemed for agricultural preservation.

Councilwoman Mary Kay Sigaty, a co-sponsor of the bill, took a moment during the meeting to emphasize the "thoughtful intent" and long-term planning that was put into the bill, attempting to calm anxieties among

residents that she said feel the bill had "fallen out of the sky without a lot of work behind it," a notion which she said is not true.

Residents in western portions of the county, led by the Dayton Rural Preservation Society, are gearing up to fight the bill, which they say creates loopholes to bring industrial mulching on agricultural preservation land. The group hopes to fill the council chambers at the public hearing on July 17 to voice opposition to the bill.